

# Democracy in the Age of Deepfakes: A Study of AI-Enabled Disinformation Campaigns in the Bihar Assembly Elections 2025

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## Abstract

Artificial intelligence (AI) is transforming the way elections are conducted and perceived. The 2025 Bihar Assembly Election show how digital campaigning has entered a new phase, where artificial content can shape what citizens see, hear, and believe. This study examines the increasing use of deepfake videos, voice cloning, and AI-generated political messages in the Bihar Assembly Election and their impact on public discourse. The research analyses selected cases of viral political content reported in the media that prompted the Election Commission of India to formulate rules on the use of synthetic material in campaigns. The study finds that political actors have utilised AI tools both to promote their own narratives and to challenge their opponents' credibility. These practices created uncertainty among voters and placed pressure on fact-checkers and regulatory bodies to promptly identify false or misleading content. The paper argues that the spread of realistic synthetic material can weaken trust in democratic communication even when elections remain free and fair. The study highlights the need for stronger digital awareness among citizens and clear responsibilities for political parties and platforms to ensure that voters are aware when content is artificially created. Bihar offers an important example of how democracy must respond when technology influences not only the message but also the very idea of what is real.

## 1. Introduction

Democracy in India is increasingly shaped by digital communication. In the past, election campaigns depended mainly on newspapers, posters, radio, and television. Today, most political parties reach voters on mobile screens through social media platforms and messaging applications. Artificial intelligence (AI) has accelerated this shift by enabling the production of images, speeches, and videos that appear realistic, even when they are not. These creations, often referred to as deepfakes, can be created by anyone with a smartphone and an internet connection.

This new form of content can influence public perception and affect electoral decision-making. It is easier than ever to create a video of a leader saying something they never said. It is also easier to spread such material to large audiences before journalists or fact-checkers can respond. When public trust is weakened, democratic decision-making becomes more difficult (Pawelec, 2022). Because citizens rely on information to make informed voting decisions and deepfakes pose a direct challenge to the reliability of communication during elections.

### 1.1. Growing International Concern

Around the world, governments and election authorities have started to notice these challenges. During recent election cycles in the United States, Indonesia, and several European countries, deepfake-style audio and video circulated widely online. Some messages were harmless satire, but others attempted to mislead voters and damage reputations ([Romero Moreno et al., 2025](#)). Policy and research institutions have described the use of AI in elections as a major concern for information security and public trust ([Brookings Institution, 2024](#)).

The spread of deepfake videos is facilitated by the fact that AI tools are becoming faster and more affordable. Content that once required skilled editing can now be created by a person with no training in a matter of minutes ([Gehringer et al., 2024](#)). This combination of speed and low cost provides political actors with strong incentives to adopt AI in their campaigns.

### 1.2. India's Digital Landscape

India has over 800 million internet users, most of whom access the internet via affordable smartphones ([National E-Governance Division, 2025](#)). Digital reach and online participation have grown rapidly, especially among young voters. Political campaigning has already moved online, and parties invest significant effort in crafting messages to different social groups and regions.

This makes India especially vulnerable to the risks posed by artificial content. False information based on identity, religion or caste can spread fast through WhatsApp groups, short videos, and personalised feeds. Once viewed, such content can influence attitudes, even if it is debunked later ([Islam et al., 2024](#)). The challenge for India is greater because its elections are large, competitive, and often emotionally charged.

### 1.3. Regulation and Institutional Response

The Election Commission of India (ECI) has taken early steps to address this issue. In 2024 and 2025, the Commission requested that political parties refrain from using deepfakes and other artificial content in their campaigns. It also directed parties to clearly label any artificial content shared online so that voters would know it was not real ([ECI, 2025](#); [TechCrunch, 2024](#)). The Commission emphasised that criticism should focus on policies and governance rather than the false representation of individuals.

These steps reflect an effort to protect the fairness of elections. However, detecting artificial content remains challenging. Platforms cannot always distinguish between real and modified materials. Enforcement becomes challenging when content spreads from unofficial accounts not directly linked to the parties (Romero Moreno et al., 2025). As a result, the regulatory system is still adapting to respond to rapidly evolving technologies.

### 1.4. Why Bihar Matters

The 2025 Bihar Assembly Elections offer an important case for study. Bihar is socially diverse, politically active, and electorally significant. Political parties in the state have already adopted digital strategies due to the increasing availability of mobile access. Reports indicate that during the 2025 campaign, AI-generated videos, edited reels, and voice cloning tools were used to influence public opinion ([India Today, 2025](#)). Some of these materials mocked rival leaders, while others sought to provoke emotional responses by addressing sensitive cultural themes.

Studying Bihar allows us to observe how artificial content is used in real electoral competition. It also helps us understand how voters react to such content and how institutions respond when false but convincing material circulates widely. Bihar, therefore, offers insights relevant to future elections, both within India and in other democracies.

### 1.5. Significance of the Study

This research contributes to the existing body of work on misinformation and democracy by focusing on a large and diverse society in the Global South. Most studies on deepfakes focus on Western countries; however, India presents a distinct technological and political environment. The study will help researchers, policymakers, journalists, and election managers understand the emerging challenges of AI-based campaigning. It will also support efforts to strengthen public awareness and protective measures for future elections.

### 1.6. Objectives of the Study

- i. To examine the nature and spread of artificial content, including deepfake videos and digitally altered political messages, during the Bihar Assembly Elections of 2025.
- ii. To assess how current rules and practices of the Election Commission of India have worked in addressing the risks posed by artificial content to voter awareness and election credibility.

## 2. Literature Review

Research on artificial intelligence in elections has grown rapidly as political communication shifts into digitally constructed environments. This review is organised into four themes: i) the global evolution of deepfakes in electoral politics, ii) psychological and political effects of synthetic media, iii) technology adoption in the Indian electoral landscape, and iv) regulatory and governance debates in India.

### 2.1. Global Rise of Deepfakes in Democratic Processes

Deepfake technology, based on advanced machine learning systems which enables the creation of synthetic video or audio that appears credible and human-generated ([Chesney & Citron, 2019](#)). Scholars widely recognise deepfakes as a contemporary threat to electoral integrity because they can distort public understanding of events and weaken trust in authentic political communication ([Pawelec, 2022](#); [Westerlund, 2019](#)).

Election cycles since 2020 have shown that synthetic media is increasingly deployed for political persuasion and disruption. During the 2024 United States elections, analysts observed AI-generated political advertisements, targeted robocalls imitating candidates, and fabricated crisis scenarios designed to influence voter emotions ([Brookings Institution, 2024](#)). In the United Kingdom and the European Union, regulators have warned that deepfake-enabled propaganda may influence referenda or close parliamentary races ([Shukla & Tripathi, 2024](#)).

Other global cases demonstrate that deepfakes often target sensitive cultural narratives. For example, manipulated videos attempting to provoke communal distrust circulated during elections in Bangladesh and Indonesia ([BBC News, 2024](#)). These examples show that democracies worldwide are grappling with an emerging information environment in which audio-visual evidence is no longer reliable.

### 2.2. Political Effects and Voter Vulnerability

Researchers have examined how deepfakes can influence cognitive processing and voting behaviour. Since audio-visual information is typically trusted more than text-based content, artificially constructed images or voices can have a stronger emotional impact and are more likely to be perceived as credible ([Vaccari & Chadwick, 2020](#)). Corrections and fact-checking efforts often fail to fully reverse the opinion change produced by initial exposure, especially when content aligns with an individual's pre-existing beliefs ([Lewandowsky et al., 2020](#)).

A growing body of evidence suggests that synthetic misinformation can:

- Intensify polarisation (Douglas & O'Brien, 2021)

- Fuel cynicism toward the political process (West, 2021)
- Create doubt even about truthful information, often called the “liar’s dividend” (Chesney & Citron, 2019)

The risk is amplified in environments where political messaging carries strong emotional cues related to identity, history, or community narratives. For democracies that depend on media-based campaigning, such as India, the challenge is particularly serious.

### 2.3. AI-Enabled Campaigning and Misinformation in India

India’s large digital ecosystem creates fertile ground for the accelerated diffusion of synthetic media. With the rapid adoption of smartphones and low data costs, online videos and messaging applications have become significant sources of political information (National E-Governance Division, 2025).

Misinformation challenges were evident during the 2019 and 2024 general elections when political actors used social media to distribute misleading clips and targeted propaganda (Singh & Smyth, 2021; Banaji & Bhat, 2020). The first documented political deepfake campaign in India emerged during the 2020 Delhi elections, involving AI-generated videos of a ruling party leader speaking in multiple local languages to reach wider audiences (The Hindu, 2020). This incident signalled how synthetic content could bypass linguistic diversity and expand political influence at scale.

More recent monitoring reveals the widespread political use of AI video dubbing, face substitution, stylised campaign avatars, and persuasion-driven reels designed to mobilise digital youth voters (India Today, 2025). These practices are no longer isolated experiments but reflect strategic adoption by several major parties. Scholars argue that the combination of deep social cleavages and fast-moving digital communication increases the chance that AI-assisted misinformation will escalate into legal, ethical, and security concerns (Basu, 2024; Islam et al., 2024).

### 2.4. Regulatory Responses and Governance Gaps in India

India has begun to respond to these risks through administrative guidelines and advisory measures. The Election Commission of India (ECI) issued directives in 2024 and 2025 requiring political parties to clearly label any artificial or altered content used in campaigns and to remove harmful synthetic material promptly once reported (ECI, 2025). The Ministry of Electronics and Information Technology has proposed that any digital AI-generated content visible to users must carry a clear label indicating its synthetic nature (Press Information Bureau, 2025).

These interventions represent early attempts to include AI within the scope of electoral ethics and public accountability. However, research highlights a number of gaps:

| Challenges                                     | Evidence in scholarship                                                                                        |
|------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Limited detection capacity                     | Technical systems for identifying deepfakes are still in the process of evolving (Romero Moreno et al., 2025). |
| Spread through informal channels.              | Unofficial or anonymous accounts escape enforcement (Basu, 2024).                                              |
| Public unawareness about synthetic information | Digital literacy remains uneven across socio-economic groups (Rao, 2023).                                      |
| Weak deterrence mechanisms                     | Penalties and enforcement are unclear or slow to operate (Singh, 2024).                                        |

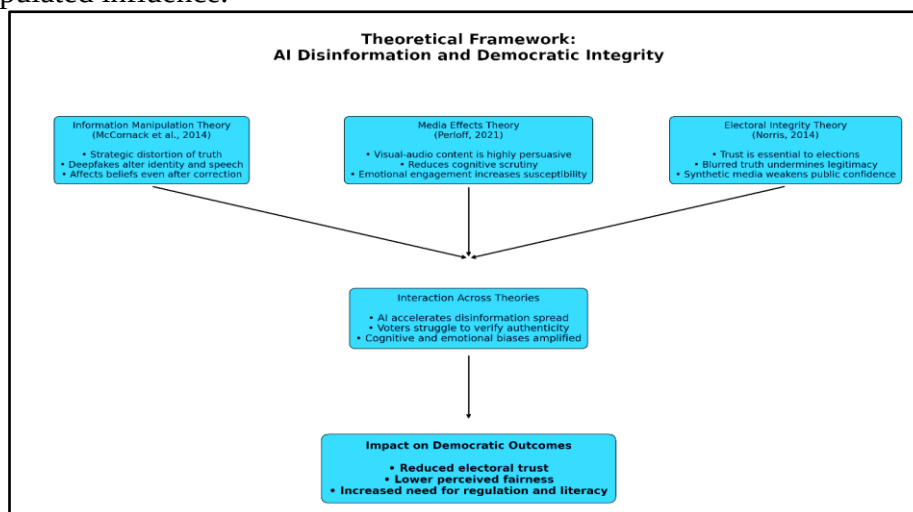
This study addresses that gap by focusing on the 2025 Bihar Assembly Elections as a key moment in India's encounter with synthetic campaigning.

## 2.5. Theoretical Framework

This study is guided by three interconnected theoretical perspectives that explain how artificial intelligence influences election communication and democratic outcomes. The first is Information Manipulation Theory, which argues that deceptive messages strategically distort information to influence beliefs and behaviours (McCormack et al., 2014). When political actors use AI to fabricate speech or alter the identities of leaders through deepfakes, they intentionally violate expectations of truth and authenticity to gain a strategic advantage. Such disruptions may shape voter opinion even when people are exposed to corrective information later, especially if the artificial content reinforces pre-existing perceptions.

The second perspective is Media Effects Theory, which highlights how the form and delivery of media content influence what audiences believe and how they respond politically (Perloff, 2021). In the digital context, audio-visual media such as synthetic videos and voice clones have stronger persuasive power because voters tend to trust what they can see and hear. Studies show that multimedia misinformation increases emotional engagement and reduces critical evaluation, thereby heightening vulnerability to manipulation (Vaccari & Chadwick, 2020; Lewandowsky et al., 2020).

The third guiding lens is Electoral Integrity Theory, which defines legitimate elections as those conducted under conditions of transparency, freedom of choice, and public confidence (Norris, 2014). Deepfakes and synthetic media threaten these principles by eroding trust in communication and weakening the perceived fairness of political competition. When the origin of information is uncertain, and fabricated content becomes indistinguishable from truth, voters may lose confidence in both candidates and institutions responsible for safeguarding elections (Chesney & Citron, 2019; West, 2021). This creates not only a misinformation risk but also a legitimacy risk, as citizens may question whether electoral decisions reflect informed public will or manipulated influence.



**Figure 1. Theoretical framework linking Information Manipulation Theory, Media Effects Theory, and Electoral Integrity Theory to AI-Enabled Disinformation in Elections.**

Fig. 1 depicts these theories together, which help explain the relationships among AI-generated disinformation, digital dissemination, voter cognition, and the credibility of democracy. Applied to the 2025 Bihar Assembly Elections, they provide a structured foundation for analysing how synthetic political content emerges, how it affects voter



perceptions, and whether regulatory interventions, such as the Election Commission of India's guidelines on AI content labelling, can successfully preserve electoral trust ([ECI, 2025](#)).

### 3. Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design grounded in content analysis and a case study approach to examine the role of AI-generated content in shaping political communication during the 2025 Bihar Assembly Elections. A qualitative framework was considered appropriate given the exploratory nature of the inquiry and the need to understand how synthetic media operates within real political contexts, rather than measuring its effects solely through numerical indicators. The case study approach enables an in-depth examination of the dynamics, meanings, and implications of AI-driven communication practices as they unfold within a specific socio-political setting ([Yin, 2018](#)).

Data collection focused on identifying and analysing instances of AI-generated political content circulated during the election period. The dataset comprised 159 media items, including deepfake videos, AI-generated reels, voice-cloned audio clips, and manipulated visual content disseminated across platforms such as X (formerly Twitter), Instagram, YouTube, and prominent digital news portals. These materials were collected between September and November 2025, a period marked by heightened campaign activity and increased public engagement. Content was selected using purposive sampling, prioritising items that demonstrated high visibility, measurable engagement (such as shares, views, or commentary), and relevance to major political actors or narratives.

To ensure analytical rigour, only content that had been verified or discussed by credible fact-checking organisations and news outlets was included. In addition to the digital artefacts, official advisories, press releases, and regulatory documents issued by the Election Commission of India, these documents were examined to contextualise institutional responses to AI-generated political communication.

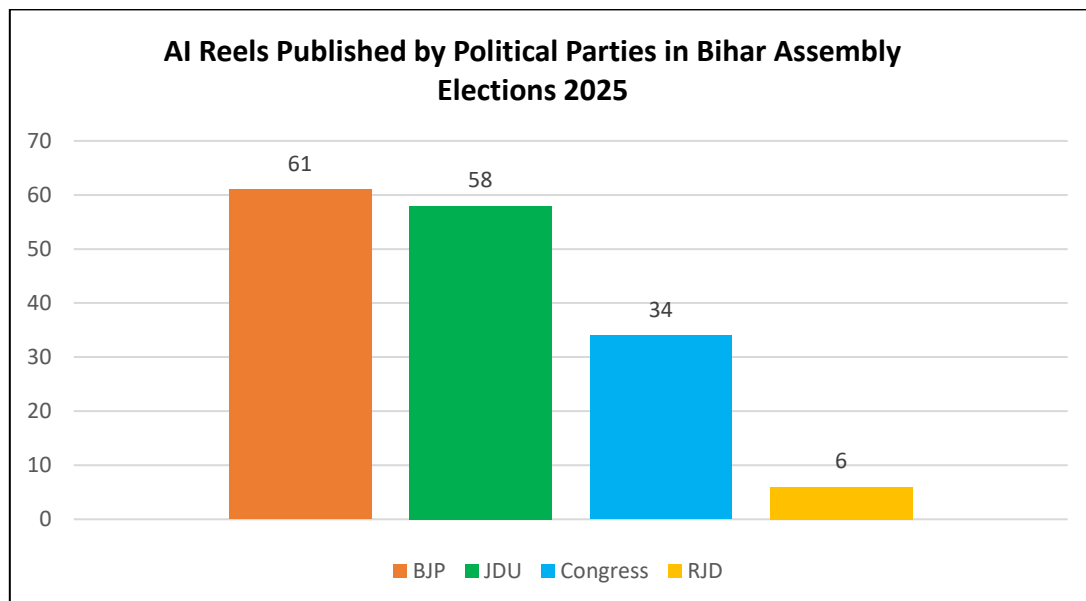
The analysis employed a thematic content analysis approach, following established qualitative procedures outlined by Braun and Clarke ([2021](#)). This involved systematic coding of the dataset to identify recurring patterns, narrative strategies, and representational techniques associated with synthetic media. Themes were refined through iterative comparison across cases, allowing for the identification of dominant modes of manipulation, such as emotional framing, identity distortion, and simulated public opinion.

By combining multiple data sources and analytical perspectives, the study enhances credibility through methodological triangulation ([Creswell & Poth, 2018](#)). This approach not only strengthens the validity of the findings but also enables a nuanced understanding of how AI-generated political content operates within contemporary electoral communication.

### 4. Findings and Discussion

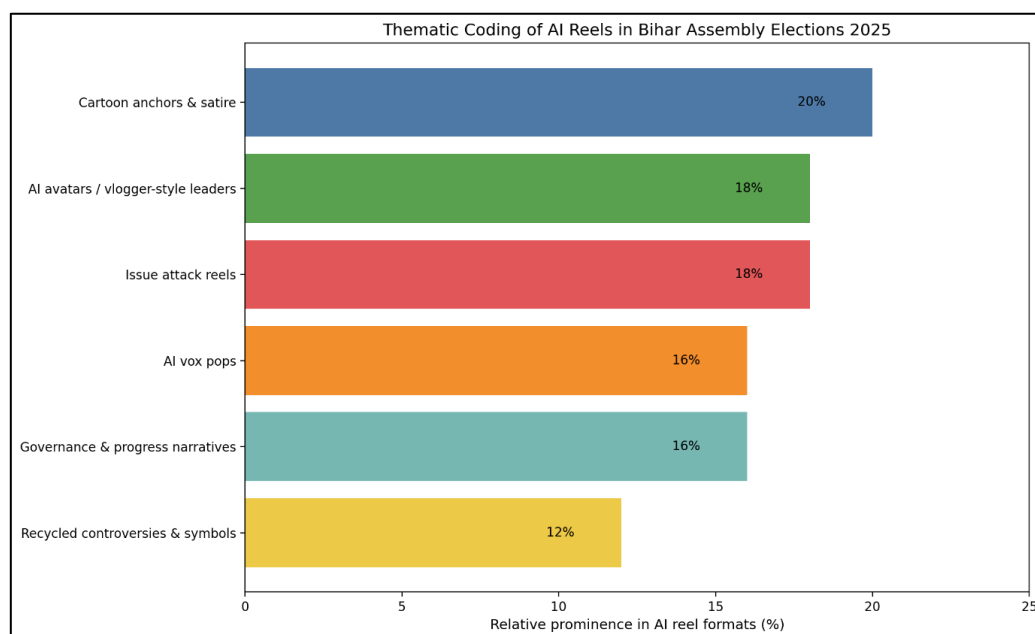
#### 4.1 The Election of AI Reels: From Digital Messaging to Visual Persuasion

The Bihar Assembly Elections 2025 marked a strategic shift from traditional ground rallies to digital campaigning. Parties have increasingly adopted AI-driven visuals for targeted persuasion, particularly through Instagram Reels, where younger voters are more actively engaged. An analysis of over 159 media items assessed across various platforms revealed that the BJP posted 61 AI-generated reels, followed by the JDU with 58, the Congress with 34, and the RJD with just 6, which indicates disparate rates of synthetic media adoption across parties (India Today, 2025). The shift toward “reels over rallies” suggests that political communication is increasingly determined by digital traction rather than traditional on-ground mobilisation.



**Figure 2: Party-wise distribution of AI reels during the Bihar Assembly Election 2025 (designed from the India Today dataset).**

These AI-generated visuals included symbolic avatars, mimicry satire, and AI-crafted “Vox Pops,” designed to appear as voices of common voters. The messaging often blended humour, local dialect, social grievances, and identity politics, making the content not only entertaining but persuasive. This aligns with media effects theory, which suggests that visual misinformation has a greater impact on cognition than text-based communication.



**Figure 3: Thematic coding of AI-generated reels circulated during the Bihar Assembly Election campaign (2025).**

As shown in Figure 3, AI-generated election reels circulated during the Bihar Assembly Elections relied most heavily on satirical character performances and cartoon-based anchors, which together accounted for approximately 20% of the analysed content. These formats were frequently used to mock political opponents and to simplify complex political narratives into

visually engaging, emotionally charged messages. Closely following this were AI-generated avatars and vlogger-style leader representations, which contributed around 18%. In this context, political figures were digitally reconstructed to deliver personalised or stylised campaign messages. A similar proportion (18 per cent) was devoted to issue-based attack reels, particularly focusing on themes such as unemployment, governance failure, and alleged vote manipulation, indicating a strategic use of synthetic media for negative campaigning.

Furthermore, AI-generated vox pops, designed to simulate public opinion and grassroots voices, constituted approximately 16% of the reel formats, which is an attempt to manufacture a sense of popular endorsement or dissent. Governance and development-oriented narratives, often presented through glossy visuals and progress-driven storytelling, also accounted for nearly 16%, which reflects efforts to project administrative competence using AI-enhanced aesthetics. The least prominent category, although still significant, involved recycled controversies and symbolic representations, accounting for 12% of the content. These reels revived past incidents or emotionally sensitive symbols to reframe contemporary political debates. This distribution highlights how AI-driven political communication in Bihar prioritised satire, personalisation, and emotional appeal over direct policy discussion, reinforcing concerns about the persuasive and manipulative potential of synthetic media in electoral contexts.

#### 4.2 Case Study 1: The “Mother Returns in a Dream” Deepfake Controversy

One of the most visible episodes during the Bihar campaign was the viral AI-generated video portraying Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his late mother, Heeraben Modi. Shared by the **official Bihar Congress X handle (Figure 2)**, the video implied a moral reprimand from the Prime Minister’s deceased mother regarding “vote theft.”



*Figure 4: Screenshot of the Bihar Congress X post portraying an AI-generated video of the late Heeraben Modi (Source X)*



This incident sparked strong criticism from BJP leaders, who described the content as unethical and emotionally exploitative. News reports and televised debates emphasised the weaponisation of cultural sentiments, particularly motherhood, which holds deep symbolic value in Indian political culture. BJP spokespeople accused the opposition of “insulting a revered mother,” while Congress defended it as “harmless satire.”



*Figure 5: Screenshot of the BJP alleging insult over the AI-generated campaign video (Source: NewsX)*

This single video became a flashpoint for multiple democratic concerns:

| Emerging Concern           | Discussion in Bihar Context                                    |
|----------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|
| Emotional manipulation     | Leveraging grief and filial respect for a persuasive effect    |
| Identity misrepresentation | Synthetic portrayal of the deceased without consent            |
| Voter deception            | Ambiguity over authenticity creates doubt and distrust.        |
| Platform accountability    | Slower moderation allowed wide public exposure before removal. |

The analysis of synthetic political content shows that deepfakes were not produced or circulated casually. They followed clear patterns intended to influence how voters interpreted political events and personalities. This aligns with the ideas proposed in Information Manipulation Theory, which suggests that deceptive communication works by subtly reshaping elements of truth rather than abandoning truth altogether (McCornack et al., 2014).

#### 4.3. Case Study 2: Moral Framing and Character Attacks Through AI Fabrication

While the Prime Minister's deepfake controversy drew significant attention, AI-generated disinformation was not limited to a single political camp. BJP-affiliated ecosystem pages and supporter accounts circulated a synthetic video depicting senior Congress leaders **Rahul Gandhi** and **Sonia Gandhi** seated in a bar, with a young woman dancing in the background.

Their faces were seamlessly inserted using deepfake facial swapping techniques, implying indulgence, elitism, and irresponsibility.



*Figure 6: Screenshot of an AI-generated video circulated on social platforms featuring Rahul Gandhi and Sonia Gandhi in a Bar.*

Source: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tx1zKd6QNAc>

This video drew upon long-standing narratives used against the Congress leadership, framing them as disconnected from ordinary citizens and insensitive to cultural norms. By portraying a mother-son political duo in a nightclub setting, the synthetic media attempted to trigger moral judgment, particularly among conservative and rural voter groups in Bihar, where cultural expectations about public behaviour remain strong.

Unlike the Congress incident, this clip originated from **unofficial political channels**, complicating accountability. This aligns with existing research that **unverified supporter networks** are increasingly used to externalise reputational risk and bypass legal liability (Basu, 2024).

This case further illustrates that:

| Vulnerability Revealed                                           | Bihar Context                                       |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| The ethical boundary between satire and defamation is dissolving | Nothing prevents the synthetic shaming of opponents |
| Deepfakes intensify pre-existing stereotypes.                    | “Elite Congress” vs. “grounded BJP” narratives      |
| Private circulation spreads faster than fact-checks.             | WhatsApp shares exceeded identifiable public views. |
| Voters trust their group networks more than platforms            | Peer sharing overrides authenticity cues            |

Taken together, the two cases demonstrate that AI-driven disinformation is not limited to any single political group but has been employed across ideological lines to influence voter

perceptions in Bihar. Yet, the effects of such manipulation are not uniform. The deepfake involving the Prime Minister and his late mother appealed to emotional reverence and grief, sparking swift public outrage through mainstream media amplification. By contrast, the Rahul–Sonia bar video operated through moral judgement and class stereotypes, circulating largely through informal networks that evade scrutiny. These differences suggest that, although the production of misinformation may appear politically balanced, its impact varies depending on voter beliefs, susceptibility to cultural cues, and the speed at which the content spreads before regulatory measures can intervene. The Bihar experience, therefore, signals an emerging arms race in synthetic persuasion where the central contest is no longer truth versus lies, but whose emotional narrative dominates the political imagination of voters.

#### **4.4. Regulatory Responses and Limitations in Addressing AI-Enabled Campaigning**

The growing use of synthetic media during the Bihar Assembly Elections 2025 prompted the Election Commission of India (ECI) to introduce new compliance mechanisms to safeguard electoral communication standards. An advisory issued in October 2025 mandated that prominent labels, such as “AI-Generated” or “Synthetic Content,” accompany any artificial political media, with the disclaimer covering at least 10 per cent of the display area and metadata disclosing the creator’s identity. These rules also prohibited the unauthorised imitation of real individuals’ voices or appearances if used to mislead voters. The ECI further required political parties to remove objectionable content within three hours of notification and warned that breaches would be penalised under the Model Code of Conduct, relevant sections of the Representation of the People Act, and updated information technology rules. These interventions highlight that unregulated AI media pose a threat to voter autonomy, public trust, and the integrity of political competition during elections.

However, evidence from the Bihar campaign suggests that enforcement remains uneven and limited by the dynamic nature of digital content circulation. While the ECI’s approach was preventive and informed by previous incidents, such as the use of multilingual AI-generated audio content in the Delhi Assembly Election (2020) or manipulated videos of national leaders during the 2024 General Elections, its ability to manage the real-time spread of deepfakes remains limited. Campaign actors increasingly deploy synthetic media through unofficial supporter accounts, parody pages, and encrypted messaging groups that escape direct regulatory oversight.

While the regulatory framework signals a strong institutional stance, the primary challenge lies in monitoring opaque dissemination channels, detecting subtle manipulations, and ensuring rapid compliance from actors operating outside formal campaign structures. The Bihar experience thus highlights a gap between rule-making and enforcement capacity, raising concerns that regulatory adaptations must evolve as quickly as the technological threats they aim to control.

#### **4.5. Synthesis: How Synthetic Media Interact with Democratic Life**

Taken together, the findings indicate that deepfakes influence elections through a complex and layered process. They reshape information, evoke emotional responses, and weaken public trust. Information Manipulation Theory helps explain how content creators exploit selective truths and familiar cues. Media Effects Theory clarifies why these videos are persuasive, especially in a society where digital consumption is visual-first. Electoral Integrity Theory reveals the broader democratic implications, including the gradual erosion of confidence in political institutions.

The Bihar case demonstrates that the threat of deepfakes is not limited to spreading false messages. It also lies in the creation of doubt, where citizens are unsure about what to trust and

whom to trust. In such an environment, misinformation does not need to be universally believed; it only needs to disrupt the clarity of public reasoning. This poses a significant challenge to democratic decision-making and the institutions responsible for protecting it.

## 5 Conclusion

The 2025 Bihar Assembly Elections demonstrate that artificial intelligence has evolved from a technological innovation to a powerful tool of political persuasion. This study shows that deepfakes and other synthetic media did not merely supplement normal campaigning; they actively shaped public narratives, emotional responses, and voter perceptions. The analysed cases reveal how political actors across parties exploited AI to construct imagery that appealed to emotions, reinforced stereotypes, or questioned the moral authority of rivals. These practices align with the patterns predicted by Information Manipulation Theory and Media Effects Theory, in which deception is strategically deployed and visually compelling misinformation overrides rational evaluation.

At the institutional level, the Election Commission of India attempted to mitigate these risks through advisory guidelines, labelling requirements, and rapid removal mandates. However, the Bihar experience demonstrates that regulation struggles to keep pace with decentralised online dissemination. Much of the synthetic content circulated through unofficial accounts and encrypted platforms, limiting the ECI's enforcement capacity and revealing a gap between policy intent and real-time control. This gap poses a deeper concern for electoral integrity, as citizens increasingly encounter digital content whose authenticity is difficult to verify. When doubt permeates democratic communication, trust in institutions weakens, and the legitimacy of electoral outcomes may be undermined.

The findings reinforce the need for a multipronged response: stronger public digital literacy, clearer accountability frameworks for political parties, collaborative monitoring mechanisms between regulators and platforms, and transparent labelling norms for AI-generated content. As India approaches future elections, the challenge is not only to prevent misinformation but also to preserve citizens' confidence in the reliability of public discourse. Bihar's 2025 election presents a warning and an opportunity, highlighting the need to rethink election governance in an era where political reality itself can be digitally manipulated.

## Conflict of Interests

None

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